



RESEARCH ARTICLE

INFLUENCE OF HEALTH EDUCATION SERVICES PROVIDED BY COMMUNITY HEALTH WORKERS
ON PERFORMANCE OF CHILD HEALTH CARE PROGRAMMES IN MBEERE SOUTH;
EMBU COUNTY; KENYA

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ARTICLE INFO

Article History:

Received 19th May, 2018

Received in revised form

24th June, 2018

Accepted 5th July, 2018

Published online 30th August, 2018

Key Words:

Health education,
Community health workers,
Burden of disease,
Community health extension workers,
mother and child health

ABSTRACT

The burden of disease has continued to increase in most countries that have low social demographic Index including Kenya at sub national levels. Following the shortage of qualified health personnel and health facilities to serve the public, Community health workers come handy to bridge the gap in the health care systems. They are the most immediate contact with the community members as they are selected from their communities by community members through public participation, hence relate well with the respective communities often the communities know them well. The role of community health workers in improving child health Programmes is not yet fully understood although likely to promote lowering the disease burden at local levels. However, their major role is often to transfer knowledge, Information and skills through health education to community members. These relationships in most cases may enable them provide basic clinical support and health education that may promote primary health care as well as secondary disease prevention. Yet, their capacity to provide these services could be limited in terms of resources, knowledge and skills. Hence the purpose of the study was to investigate the influence of health education services provided by community health workers in the performance of child health care programmes; the case of Mbeere south in Embu county, Kenya. The objectives of the study were to determine how; Information provided through Newsletters, brochures; educational household visits and creation of awareness of diseases, injuries or risk factors influenced performance of child health care programmes. The study adopted Cross-sectional survey design and targeted a population of 346 households that had children aged five years and below and being served by 32 community health workers and 4 Community Health Extension Workers. The study had 222 respondents that is, 186 households, 32 Community Health Workers and 4 Community Health Extension Workers. Community health workers provided information on general healthcare practices, nutrition issues, and post/pre-natal care. The study found that Mothers were conversant and well instructed on child and maternal healthcare by the Community Health Workers. Community Health Workers effectively provided information on the need to seek antenatal care since majority of the households 125(69%) strongly agreed that they well advised on best practice. This could most likely led to low rates of mortality cases for new born babies in the area. It was therefore, recommended that there should be sustainable provision of educational service to communities in order reduce the burden of disease among children in the communities.

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Citation: Rehema Ibrahim, Dr. Peter Keiyoro and Dr. Josephine Ngunjiri, 2018. "Influence of health education services provided by community health workers on performance of child health care programmes in Mbeere South; Embu County; Kenya", *International Journal of Current Research*, 10, (08), 72168-72171.

INTRODUCTION

In Sub-Saharan Africa infectious diseases are still a health concern although globally the burden of disease could be shifting to non-communicable conditions. This is so especially for the under-five populations. In the year 2016 this region had 100 deaths per 1000 live births for the under-five age group (UN IGME, 2017).

These translated to 15,000 amenable deaths daily estimated to be 5.6 million deaths annually. This mortality rate is 8.3 times higher compared to the 2030 target stipulated in sustainable development goals. Although, the same source indicated that the decline in mortality rate was steady though sluggish from 1990 to 2016. The causes of death are likely to spread over a wide spectrum. However, these Causes of death differ substantially from one country to another for example pneumonia and diarrhea remain the infections that are most often associated with child deaths. The lives of an estimated million children could be saved each year if proven

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DOI: <https://doi.org/10.24941/ijcr.32044.08.2018>

interventions such as antibiotics for pneumonia and oral rehydration therapy for diarrhea were universally available (Black *et al.*, 2003). In Sub Saharan Africa many countries face the challenge of organizing health service delivery in a manner that provides quality and accessible health care to their populations against a background of economic stagnation and limited resources. In response to these challenges, different governments have been implementing health sector reforms. For example, Kenya, Uganda, Ghana, Liberia and South Africa have implemented national Programmes for community health workers (WHO, 2007). In Liberia, the Community Health Workers provide health services by advising mothers on the need to visit health facilities during prenatal period and also by identifying possible complications that would require treatment at health facilities (MoHSW, 2007b). Community Health Workers are assumed to be effective in provision of health care, since they are able to get in contact with the women in their community regardless of their societal position and also ensure they seek the right medical care. Kenya has recorded an increase of almost 20 per cent in immunization coverage. According to administrative data provided by the Ministry of Health, 84 per cent of children who are less than one year of age have received all the scheduled routine vaccines (UNICEF, 2016). This shows an improvement from 65 per cent reported in the 2008-2009 Kenya Demographic and Health survey. Although the number of unimmunized children has declined over the years, an estimated 176,000 children did not receive any routine vaccines in 2015. Most of the unvaccinated children live in hard to reach areas of Northern Kenya where pastoral and mobile communities live. Low birth weight among children under-five remains also a public health concern in Kenya with a national prevalence of 6.7 per cent. Acute malnutrition also poses a direct threat to the reduction of under-five mortality in Kenya. Between 300,000 to 400,000 Kenyan children suffer from one or other life-threatening condition. There are wide ranges of disparities in the prevalence of child wasting depending on the geographical area and sociodemographic percentiles. The former North Eastern Province has an acute malnutrition rate of 19.5 per cent, which is about three times the national average. There is also important seasonal variability linked with the food security situation in the country and other co-morbidity factors such as diarrhea outbreaks. (KNBSES, 2013).

Utilizing community health workers has been identified as one approach to addressing the growing shortage of healthcare workers, particularly in low-income countries and hard to reach communities. Evaluation of community health workers' involvement in general performance health care programmes is a focus of much attention as many countries had invested in them as a strategy for the achievement of the millennium development goals (Haines *et al.*, 2007). The effectiveness of Community Health workers has been demonstrated in some studies for example, in India where involvement of Community health workers in Healthcare activities resulted in significant reduction of low birth weight, preterm births and neonatal sepsis (Marwa, 2017). The implementation of the Community Health Workers concept in Kenya is marked by unanswered questions of long term sustainability and programme effectiveness. Despite the existence of community health workers, reports have shown that cases of Child mortality rate and Maternal Mortality Rate (MMR) continue to increase in some countries (UNICEF, 2010). For instance, in the year 2014 there were 28 cases of child mortality against 43 reported in Mbeere South Sub County. The Sub County has very few

health centres despite being the largest sub county in terms of geographical position in Embu County. Regardless of the huge experience with Community Health Workers the burden of disease continues to increase in magnitude and diversity and relatively little scientific evidence is available to answer basic questions especially the role of community health workers in the improvement of performance of child health care Programmes. What is not clear is whether the community health workers are delivering their services to residents of the area by utilizing Health education approach while targeting child healthcare services in the sub county. It is because of these observations that the study was set out to investigate how health education offered by the community Health workers influenced the services provided in the child Health care programme in Mbeere south, Embu county. Community health workers are successful in providing health education because they are from the community; therefore, a trustful relationship is already established and integration into the community occurred. Elsewhere Partners in Health (2011) observed that CHW can provide basic clinical support and health education that may promote primary as well as secondary disease prevention. Community Health Workers can play a vital role in working within a community-based team to educate women on the importance and how to take care of the children.

They play a major role in empowering women to attend antenatal, delivery, and postnatal care with a skilled professionalism (Population Council, 2012) A survey conducted by WHO, (2007) showed that Community Health Workers were actively involved with their communities by providing predominantly health education, information/referrals and translation services in the areas of, Maternal and Child Health/Perinatal and Family Planning. Community Health Workers provide general health education as well as how to feed children with the right diet, how to bath children especially the new-born in the families. The purpose of the study was therefore was to investigate the influence of health education services provided by CHWS on performance of child health care programmes; the case of Mbeere south in Embu county, Kenya. The objectives of the study was to determine how; Information provision through Newsletters, brochures; educational visits and creation of awareness influenced performance of child health care programmes.

MATERIALS AND METHODS

The study used a Cross-sectional survey design which adopted both quantitative and qualitative methods of data collection. Structured questionnaires were used to survey responsibilities of community health workers in improving children health care Programmes. This approach is considered most appropriate for the study because of its ability to elicit a diverse range of baseline information (Gakuu, Kidombo and Keiyoro, 2018). On the qualitative dimension, key informants were interviewed to obtain opinions of Community Health Workers and Community Health Extension Worker on how the roles of Community Health Workers improved children health care Programmes. The target population for this study consisted of all the households with children under 5 years in Mbeere South Sub County. The researcher purposefully selected the geographical area because it represented the area with the highest average number of Community Health Workers in Embu County (RoK, 2017).

Table 1. Target Population and Sample size

Category	Target Population	Sample size
Households that had Children Below 5 years	346	186
Community Health workers	32	32
Community Health Extension Workers	4	4
Total	382	222

Table 2. Provision of health educational services and implementation process of child health care Programmes

	Strongly disagree		Disagree		Undecided		Agree		Strongly agree	
	F	%	F	%	F	%	F	%	F	%
Provided information through Newsletters and brochures	3	2	14	7	15	8	28	16	120	67
Usually advised about warmth and promotion of early and exclusive breastfeeding	5	3	11	6	14	8	10	6	140	78
Advised on need for skilled birth attendance and disseminating key messages to support safe pregnancy and delivery of a healthy new born	4	2	7	4	15	10	30	17	124	69

Although Mbeere South population is approximately 40,367 the target population involved households that had children below the age of five years old. The 346 households, 32 Community Health Workers and 4 Community Health Extension Workers formed the target study population. The availability, locations and work stations of community Health workers were known. Table 1 shows the target population for this study.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Community Health Workers usually provided information on need for warmth and promotion of early and exclusive breastfeeding: 5(3%) strongly disagreed, 11(6%) disagreed, 14(8%) undecided, 10(6%) agreed and majority 120(67%) strongly agreed. Community Health Workers provided advice on new-born care and on need for seeking immunization; 4(2%) of the participants strongly disagreed 10(6%) agreed, 8(4%) were undecided, 20(11%) agreed and majority 138(76%) strongly agreed. The Health Workers promoted the need for skilled birth attendance by disseminating key messages to support safe pregnancy and delivery of new born; 4(2%) strongly disagreed, 7(4%) disagreed, 15(20%) undecided, 30(17%) agreed and majority 124(69%) strongly agreed.

DISCUSSION

The study found out that mothers in Mbeere South are well informed and advised on child health care and maternal healthcare and this could lead to low rates of mortality cases for new born babies in the area. Community Health Workers played a major role in empowering women to attend antenatal clinics, delivery, and postnatal care with a skilled professional. A survey conducted by WHO, (2007) also found that Community Health Workers are involved with their communities by providing predominantly health education, information/referrals, maternal and Child Health/Perinatal and Family Planning education services. The health workers provided general health education as well as how to feed children with the right diet, as well as how to bathe children especially the new-born.

Conclusion

Mothers in Mbeere South were well informed and advised on child health care and maternal healthcare by the Community Health Workers. This could most likely lead to low rates of mortality cases for new born babies in the area.

Recommendation

The researchers recommended that there should be an increase of the rate of provision educational services. It is suggested that a study is needed for a combined all stakeholders support in order to provide Community Health Workers with relevant materials and knowledge support on how to address challenges concerning child health care and Health. A study is needed that would measure the change in the maternal and child mortality during the period the Health care givers were involved in the project and attempt to relate this to the impact of provision of health education.

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